

Army of Shadows's last shadow : Jean Cavailles
as Luc and Jean-Francois.

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Abstract

We defend here the thesis that Jean Cavailles was not represented by character Luc in 'Army of Shadows', but the two Jardie brothers at once.

Two illusions : a film and a critics' fable

Melville's representation of Jean Cavailles was astute, but so far mostly greatly misunderstood : Cavailles, in "Army of Shadows", was not character Luc Jardie, as regularly still advanced, but the two Jardie brothers at once : Luc *and* Jean-Francois.

Melville gave the latter the diminutive nickname "*petit Jean*" (the little Jean), among other features.

This hypothesis is consistent with previous depictions, Canguilhem's *Life and Death* and the biography of Cavailles' sister Gabrielle Ferrieres – the two principal sources of information on the life of this philosopher, historically. Both had highlighted his duality, as "philosopher and fighter", the original subtitle of the biography.

These two sides of Cavailles are found in the film as two ostensibly separate characters. The same, we argue. "*To understand one, we must understand the other*" – was Canguilhem's main proposition in the portrayal of his lost friend.

This hypothesis of "two Jardie" as one character : what some may call a theoretical 'tour de force' strikes as more plausible than the idea of Cavailles as Luc only : a recluse, Parisian, villa-inhabiting philosopher... (Cavaillès was neither, nor.) — the lasting, dominant interpretation.

Add Jean-Francois – a flamboyant, action-loving pilot – and a much more accurate portrait of the real Cavailles emerges.

Two biographies : Ferrieres and Canguilhem

Knowledge of Jean Cavailles' life has historically come from two sources, primarily :

- The biography written by his sister Gabrielle, "Jean Cavailles. Philosophe et combattant."
- Georges Canguilhem's "Life and Death".

The former was published after the War, in 1950, by a major French academic house ('Presses universitaires de France', or PUF for short) and served for 25 years as the principal (and sole book?) source of information on the life of this philosopher;

Succeeded in 1976 by the publication of Georges Canguilhem's "Life and Death" – an important philosopher himself (in the same broad tradition of the "philosophy and history of science" that had developed during that time in France¹), former Resistance member, friend.

This was a collection of three speeches by him, of which the most important is no doubt the second one : the speech on public radio for (the prestigious, slightly high-brow but still widely accessible) *France culture* channel. Meanwhile the first one was given to a much more restricted audience of students at the University of Strasbourg a few years earlier. The third one, later, was again to a university group (yet another classroom was dedicated to Cavailles).

¹Gaston Bachelard can be considered the initiator of this particular style of philosophy and history, though antecedents can always be found. He was the one philosopher who was closest to them and still alive, at least. (His work spanned the 1920's, 1930's and onward.)

Notable is that the *France culture* interview took place in the same year that saw the release of *Army of Shadows*, only one month apart, in October.

Here Canguilhem declared for everyone who listened, and wanted to hear : "If he's not a hero, then who is?"... Both sources of information highlighted the duality of Cavailles : an exceptional intellectual, and a fearless ("casse-cou", break-a-neck) fighter during World War II.

In the speech we have highlighted, Georges Canguilhem had given of Cavailles a description to last for eternity :

*"a philosopher-mathematician loaded with explosives, tenacious
but without delusions"*

This encapsulated the two sides of Jean Cavailles.

At the same time he insisted that both should not be considered separately, but one informed the other.

As for the biography, the title has since changed, but the original was "philosopher and fighter". The same duality, again.

In *Army of Shadows*, Jean-Francois and Luc are the film evocation of this double nature. But, they are only one person.

Two brothers : Luc and Little Jean

Pay close attention to the opening scenes, as one always should, in cinema or literature, when we see Jean-Francois and Luc together for the first time :

As his brother enters the room, Luc exclaims : oh, here comes "*petit Jean*"!

From this perspective, Jean-Francois, the "petit"/little Jean, and Luc, the older Jean, become two figures of Cavailles.

They are only distinct in the same way that some faces of a coin or medal are.

Melville couldn't have been more explicit than by providing us with this piece of information.

Its importance cannot be exaggerated : it is, after all, their very first exchange, and the first words coming out of Luc.

Jean-Francois is a representation of Cavailles too.

Pay some more attention, and watch :

In these initial segments, Jean-Francois is shown standing, walking – evocative of a worldly disposition – while Luc sits, with a book in his hands – representative of the scholarly turn of mind.

Luc, in turn, is given the nickname "Saint Luke" for that reason.

But, as Jean(-Francois) enters the room, Luc puts his book away. He does more : he removes his glasses too (the scholarly blinds).

They then embrace, becoming one.

Jean Cavailles was not Luc, we know now, no more than the character of Jean-Francois was exterior to the portrayal of Cavailles found in *Army of Shadows*.

Jean Cavailles is split into Luc and Jean-Francois respectively :

The anonymous, unseen "Jardie" – a combination of both – was the true representation of Cavailles, here.

This is the truth of *Army of Shadows* : the two brothers Jardie are one and the same person — the real Jean Cavailles.

The duality of Cavailles in *Army of Shadows* was never the Wayne/Batman kind, or 'Hooded Justice'/Reeves type.

The revelation of Luc was entirely else...

Not an internal duality, but an external one, a duality of characters.

This, in short, was the thesis defended here.

And, neither was Cavailles Jean-Francois only, an even less plausible though alternative interpretation to dominant reception, but note that Jean-Francois was the first Jardie to appear on screen...

Conclusion

“To make use of psychology is as absurd as deriving morals from real life...”, Cavailles told us through Kant in *On Logic and Theory of Science*;

Just as looking for truth in a work of art based on authors’ intentions only is grossly misguided.

We say merely ‘better for it’, if they had meant it so.

If Melville had not intended it, he got lucky : for, he flipped a coin, and no matter which face it landed one, it was always the right one.

References

- Canguilhem, Georges. [1976/1984]. “Life and Death of Jean Cavailles”. Pierre Laleure.
- Ferrieres, Gabrielle. 1950. “Jean Cavailles”. PUF.
- Melville. 1969. *Army of Shadows*.

A future edition of this film should include Canguilhem’s radio speech, if still available somewhere (the archives of *France Culture* seems to be the most likely bet).